WORLD HISTORY
INSIDER

Members' Magazine

April 2025



Treasures from the Melsonby Hoard

Engaging with cultural heritage and improving history education worldwide

2,784
definitions

1,563
articles

18,053
illustrations

2,492
videos

10,373
translations

1,058
contributors

37,271
registered users

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Welcome



Welcome to your April issue!

It's all happening here at WHE, with three new team members joining us, so do have a look at the team news to find out all the latest news. You can also see the link there to an interview with Jan, our CEO, which was recently published, and which touched on the whole AI/ Google v. publishers current conundrum. In this issue we also publish the second prize winning entry from our *Ink of Ages Fiction Prize* - another gripping story!

There were quite a few exhibitions opening this month, so three are featured for you. Those who are interested in the murky world of spies and spying will enjoy an exhibition all about MI5 on at the National Archives in London, and those interested in early photography will love the new exhibition opening at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. There is also a review of the lovely exhibition on at the National Gallery in London, on the golden age of painting from Siena, Italy, between 1300-1350.

In the news section you can read all about the possible links between the Sutton Hoo treasure in the UK and Denmark, a brain that was turned into glass at Pompeii, a message in a bottle unearthed in a Scottish theatre, and bone fragments in Spain which are the oldest to be found in Western Europe.

We have a special feature on the Melsonby Hoard discovered in the UK and an in-depth feature on Fatima Al-Fihri, a philanthropist and scholar, who founded Al-Warawiyyin University, the world's oldest, continuously running university, in Fez, Morocco.

Thank you for being a member of WHE! With advertising revenues dropping due to AI, your support has never been so important to us - so thank you!

I hope you enjoy this issue. Happy reading!



Dr Fiona Richards
Editor, *World History Insider*

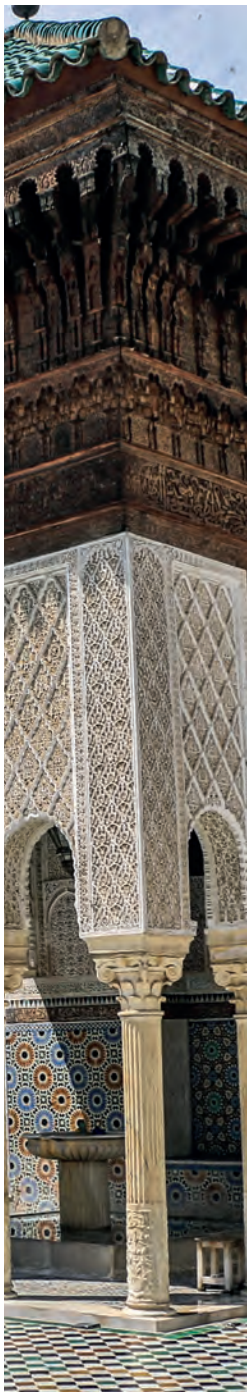
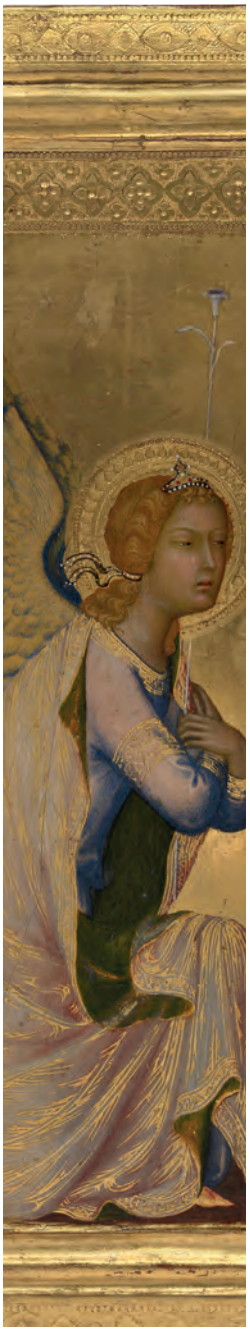
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Team News

Jan's latest update:
At the beginning of March, I attended the Beeler.Tech Base. Camp conference in Las Vegas – a conference about digital publishing and advertising. One of the keynote speakers was Alex Kantrowitz, a tech journalist whose work focuses on the big technology companies that shape our lives.

We spoke after his talk, and I asked him: "Do any of the tech CEOs that you know, who are driving AI forward, consider the possibility that in the future, AI might cause publishing no longer to be a profitable enterprise, resulting in a loss of reliable information published online, which in turn would mean that AI would run out of 'food' to learn from?" His answer was very clear: "No, they don't."

He was very intrigued by the dystopian possibility that I outlined and he asked to interview me the next day. The interview is now published on his Substack newsletter Big Tech and **you can read it here**.

The interview makes us sound rather depressed about the future – we're not, we do have a good plan moving forward. Still, it is important to consider what bad effects AI could cause. Publishing will change, especially online, as the open internet as we know it is currently being turned into one driven by AI and the big technology companies that control it.

We are happy to welcome three new team members:

Fabio Sappino is working with us for the next six months as part of our partnership with the London Arts & Humanities Project PhD placement. Fabio is undertaking a PhD and his research area is Italian colonialism under Mussolini.

Matteo Arnetoli will be our new SEO Manager. He will be responsible for our search engine optimisation (SEO) to ensure that our website and its articles are found on Google. He's originally Italian, lives in England, works in SEO professionally, and has a background in archaeology. A great fit for the position.

Fabian Apostoaie will be our new X / Twitter Editor. He's a recent graduate from the University of Cambridge with a degree in History and Politics. He also has experience with social media management and journalism through his past experience with the Cambridge University student newspaper.

Additionally, we've taken feedback into account and increased the font size of the article text on our website. This will make it easier to read *World History Encyclopedia* for all those whose eyesight is not the best (me included). We hope you will find it helps!

In other team news, Mark reports that the team have now moved on from publishing on North American indigenous peoples, to the years and events leading up to the US Civil War. Meanwhile, the WWII coverage has turned to the German-Soviet theatre, the deadliest one of the entire conflict. He also notes that the editorial team have published 100 new articles and definitions so far in 2025. *[That's a lot of hard work in three months! Ed.]*

Images of the Month

Images that have caught the attention of the Editor







Top, left: A 16th-century German ring that unfolds into an astronomical sphere. Swedish History Museum

Top, right: The ring lady of Herculaneum. A Roman woman, around 45 years of age, who died near the ancient waterfront of the Roman town, during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. She was found surrounded by her gold jewellery and still wearing two gold rings on her left hand.

Above: The roofs of the buried town of Herculaneum are exposed for the first time in 1,800 years during excavations in 1931.

This month's highlights chosen by Mark Cartwright

Petticoat Affair

The Petticoat affair, also called the Eaton affair, was a political scandal that rocked Washington, D.C., from 1829 to 1831, during the early years of Andrew Jackson's presidency. Revolving around the rumoured sexual promiscuity of Peggy Eaton, wife of the US secretary of war, the affair divided Jackson's cabinet and reshuffled the leadership of the fledgling Democratic Party.

Had the Petticoat affair been merely a White House sex scandal, it would have been an interesting historical anecdote, though not one of much importance. However, the affair had consequences that would shape the political history of the United States for the next few decades. It remains a colourful chapter in the political history of the United States.

Read more>



An image from a cigar box depicting Margaret 'Peggy' Eaton (née O'Neill)



Discovery of Nat Turner, *wood engraving by William Henry Shelton illustrating Benjamin Phipps's capture of Nat Turner*

Nat Turner's Rebellion

Nat Turner's Rebellion (also known as the Southampton Insurrection) was a slave revolt in Southampton County, Virginia, between 21 and 23 August 1831. Led by Nat Turner (l. 1800-1831), an educated slave, the insurrectionists killed at least 55 White people before the revolt was put down, making it the deadliest slave uprising in US history.

Turner eluded a massive manhunt until 30 October 1831, when his hiding place was discovered and Turner's fate was sealed as soon as he was apprehended. He was found guilty and hanged on 11 November 1831. To the White community, he was a dangerous criminal who had been justly executed, but, to the Blacks and abolitionists, he was a freedom fighter and martyr, which is how he is regarded today. **Read more>**



Hiroshima after the Atomic Bomb Attack
Imperial War Museums (CC BY-NC-SA)

What Were the Consequences of WWII?

The consequences of the Second World War (1939-45) were many and varied. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and military-dominated Japan were all defeated. Many occupied countries were liberated and regained their freedom while others were obliged to bear overrule by the USSR or the United States.

The old world order was turned upside down as empires fell and former colonies won independence. Victory had cost 60 million lives and caused millions more casualties. Still more millions had escaped death or injury but were made homeless or refugees. Never before had a war affected so many people, in so many places and in so many ways.

Read more>

Why Was Fascism Obsessed With Sports?

Can physical education be part of a totalitarian project to control and reshape the masses? Both the leader of Fascist Italy, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), and the leader of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), believed that sports could be used to forge the bodies and minds of their nation's youth, preparing them for their future role as warriors.

In both fascist regimes, one of the first steps for the creation of the 'new citizen' was the political use of physical activities, even from a young age and for both boys and girls. Sports became fundamental to build consensus and to build the national conscience, strengthening discipline, team spirit, and virility.

Read more>



Propaganda Picture of a Shirtless Mussolini
Unknown Photographer (Public Domain)

Object of the Month | Gold Coin of Sassanian Queen

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gold Coin of Boran
7th century CE

Boran and Azarmiduxt were queens of the Sassanian Empire. Boran (r. 630, 631-632) and Azarmiduxt (r. 630-631) were the only queens of the Sassanian Empire who ruled with the power of absolute monarchs. Daughters of Shahanshah (king of kings) Khosrow II (r. 590-628), Boran and Azarmiduxt, tried to hold the empire together as it grappled with a civil war between two groups of the nobility, the Pahlavs and the Parsigs, and the Islamic invasion.



After the Persians experienced a tremendous defeat in the Byzantine-Sassanian War of 602-628, the nobility declared Khosrow II's son Sheroe king of kings. He took the regnal name of Kavad II (r. 628 CE). Khosrow II was then executed by the nobility for starting the war and causing such strife in the Sassanian Empire. To secure his claim to the throne, Kavad II executed all of his brothers and half-brothers and spared only his sisters, Boran and Azarmiduxt.

Boran and Azarmiduxt went before Kavad II. They berated him for committing dishonor in taking the crown by killing their father and brothers and not earning it by right. The sisters also cursed Kavad II to have a miserable time in power. It is said that after hearing Boran and Azarmiduxt, Kavad II wept bitterly and tore the crown off his head in shame. After a few short months, Kavad II died of the plague, and his son Ardeshir III (r. 628-630) became the king of kings.

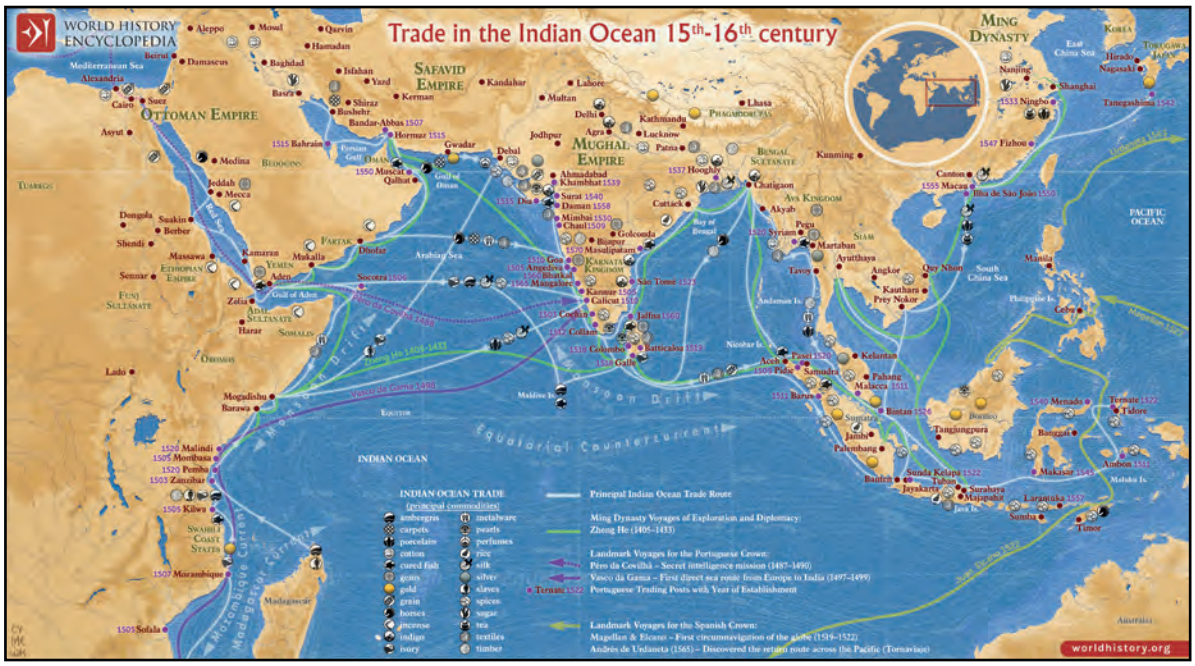
Ardeshir III was only seven years old, and Shahbaraz (r. 630), one of Khosrow II's generals in the Byzantine-Sassanian War, was enraged that a boy became king of kings instead of him. With the backing of Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641), Shahbaraz rebelled, had Ardeshir III killed, and took power for himself. Shahbaraz was not a member of the Sassanian dynasty, and the empire's elites hated him because he had no claim to the kingship.

The Pahlavs, an influential group of the nobility in the Sassanian Empire, killed Shahbaraz and dragged his body through the streets to dishonour him. They then installed Boran on the throne because she was the only direct heir of Khosrow II left alive who could legitimately take power. **Read more>**

Above: Gold coin of Boran. Photo by Amitchell125. Article by Keenan Baca-Winters

Maps | From the Cartographer's Desk

Maps by Simeon Netchev



SIMEON'S CHOICE OF THE MONTH:

This map illustrates the Indian Ocean trade (15th–16th centuries), a vast maritime network linking East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, facilitating the exchange of spices, textiles, metals, timber, and luxury goods. Dominated by Arab, Indian, Persian, and Southeast Asian merchants, it thrived through major hubs like Calicut, Malacca, Hormuz, and Aden. The Ottoman Empire controlled key overland and maritime routes, particularly in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, acting as a gateway between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Seeking to bypass Ottoman control and Muslim intermediaries, the Portuguese arrived via the southern route around Africa, followed by the Dutch and Spanish. Their armed trading fleets and fortified outposts disrupted traditional networks, imposing monopolies on key commodities like spices and shifting control of Indian Ocean trade toward Europe.

Don't forget, you can **purchase Simeon's maps here.**

Major Historical Anniversaries | April

1 April
Royal Air Force (RAF) founded (1918)
Founded shortly before the end of WWI, the RAF is the oldest independent air force in the world. It played a vital role in defending Britain from Nazi Germany during the Battle of Britain in WWII.

2 April
Argentina invades the Falklands (1982)
On this day in 1982, troops from Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, a South Atlantic archipelago that is a colony of the UK. The move sparked a ten-week conflict known as the Falklands War, at the end of which the UK emerged victorious.

4 April
Dr Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated (1968)
American civil rights leader and activist Dr Martin Luther King Jr. was fatally shot by James Earl Ray in a motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He was 39 years old.

NATO created (1949)
12 nations came together to sign the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The mutual defence pact united the countries against the threat of Soviet expansion into Western Europe.

6 April
First modern Olympic Games (1896)
The ancient Greeks invented the first Olympic games around 776 BCE and the event continued until 393 CE. Then 1,500 years passed before the games were revived as the modern Olympics, an event we continue to celebrate every four years.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel born (1806)
Famed English engineer and inventor, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, was born on this day in 1806. Throughout his career, he designed several railways, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, and ships.

12 April
Yuri Gagarin becomes the first man in space (1961)
Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, flew into space aboard the Soviet spacecraft Vostok I. In doing so, he became the first human being to have ventured into the black void.

14 April
John Wilkes Booth shoots Abraham Lincoln (1865)
Whilst enjoying a theatre show in Washington, President Abraham Lincoln was shot by actor and Confederate sympathiser John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln died the next morning becoming the first U.S. president to be assassinated.







15 April
The *Titanic* sinks (1912)
At the launch of the *Titanic*, it was famously declared: 'Not even God himself could sink this ship.' In the end, the luxury liner met its end in the Atlantic Ocean after striking an iceberg.

19 April
The American War of Independence begins (1775)
After years of simmering tensions between American colonists and the British, things boiled over in Massachusetts, as the first military engagements of the American Revolutionary War broke out within the towns of Lexington and Concord.

21 April
Rome founded (753 BCE)
The legend of the founding of Rome was famous amongst ancient Romans. They believed that on 21 April, 753 BCE, brothers Romulus and Remus founded the city on the site where they were suckled by a she-wolf when they were infants.

23 April
Shakespeare born (1564)
England's most famous bard wrote nearly 40 plays during his life, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet,* and *Macbeth*.

26 April
Chernobyl nuclear disaster occurs (1986)
A late-night safety test went wrong at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant near the city of Pripyat in Ukraine, and the world experienced the worst nuclear accident in history. Dozens of people were killed in the immediate aftermath and thousands more in the ensuing years as the disaster released 400 times more radiation into the atmosphere than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during WWII.

30 April
The Bristol Bus Boycott begins (1963)
By 1963, the state-owned Bristol Omnibus Company was yet to employ a single non white driver or conductor in its network. The Bristol Bus Boycott, spearheaded by the West Indian Development Council, was a watershed moment in Black British history that led to meaningful change in the country's discrimination laws.

Adolf Hitler commits suicide in the Führerbunker (1945)
With Soviet tanks rolling in from the east and Allied forces racing towards Berlin from the west, Adolf Hitler knew his ideological dream of Nazi Germany was over. Hitler decided to end his life before he could be captured and shot himself in the head.







SECOND PLACE WINNER, INK OF AGES FICTION PRIZE



Senthan Thomas Sivasangar

Senthan Thomas Sivasangar is an author of fiction works ranging from sci-fi/mystery short stories to low fantasy novels.

Having graduated from King's College London with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Film Studies, he now spends much of his time (when he isn't crippled by sports injuries) working with and coaching children in the South London area. In his free time, he works on hammering away at solving the same endless riddle as any other writer: going from the casual to the part-time to the full-time.

Møya is inspired by Møya i Ulveham – an old Norwegian myth spread via folk ballads in the 18th and 19th centuries across the Norwegian county of Telemark. Not much is known about the origins of this story, but it was brought once more to the public eye by Norway's entry into the Eurovision Song Contest 2024 – Ulveham by Gåte. More can be found in the online version of Norway's National Library.

DON'T FORGET!

If you love reading stories, then why not volunteer to help our reading team for the next round of submissions later in the year? Email **hello@worldhistory.org** to register your interest.

The third prize-wining story will be published in our May issue.



Møya

by Senthan Thomas Sivasangar

"Lyall. It is Lyall ... isn't it?"

Her voice shivered, like autumn leaves trapped in winter's breeze, but I stayed frozen, watching her reflection on the mirror in front of me. My silence asked her questions, and she answered between flickers of firelight:

"Your eyes give you away. My sister told me about your eyes."

Shadows shifted and shaped across her face, revealing her details one at a time, but never all at once, and I saw within them the woman soaked in guilt. From my chest beat the heart of an animal, and from somewhere in my stomach ascended an incandescent snarl that grew to fill the room.

She didn't react.

Instead, she walked around me, brushing a leg across the fur on my side, and lowered herself to a chair perched by a table.

The feeling came over me again, as it so often had in the last few days, since I'd awoken to find myself in the body of a monster. It was a feeling of rage, of uninhibited fury that nipped at my skin like breaths of cold wind, pulling me to pounce to her neck and sink my teeth through every inch of her skin.

It was the one thing that reminded me that I was still human, somewhere – the hesitation.

She raised a hand, noticing the fur on my back stand on end, noticing my eyes grow narrowed and bloodshot.

"I know what you want to do ... to me."

The arch in my back softened at the sound of her voice, and my throat's grip loosened. As if at the flip of a coin, the air became filled with something different.

"I wouldn't blame you. My sister has forced this spell from my hand in the past. And every time it is cast I feel a part of my self wither away."

A spell. As soon as I'd seen this hut, standing lone where the forest meets the lake, dark magic twisting from its every corner, suspicions grew from my mind like tortured weeds. My answers lay within.

And though I knew it, somewhere, that it was a work of magic, that the woman before me was a witch, the witch, responsible for my midnight transmutation, a part of me stuttered. She sat before me, my life in her lap, yet she did not seem to know it. Her eyes were a hollow silver, and her skin had gone deathly pale. Her hair, once a deep gold, had faded into stiffened strands of wiry silver.

She looked tired.

Still, the pieces refused to fall into place until she continued:

"My name is Gunnhild. My sister ...

Well, my sister is the woman your father has had the misfortune of falling in love with."

I stepped back. The crackles of the fire grew deafening, and the frosty air in the cabin snapped at my ankles until the muscles went rigid. The emotions of an animal coursed



through my blood and I conspired, with what little remained of my consciousness, to sigh them away. I lowered myself where I stood, shaking over every inch, and looked up at her with tilted eyes. I spoke in my head, and I prayed she would hear me:

Tell me, I said. Tell me everything.

It made sense, in that moment, when she dropped her head with a solemn nod. A witch hears the words upon the wind that everybody else dismisses as background noise. Naturally she would hear me, a victim of her twisted magic.

With a heaving sigh, she stepped to what looked like a kitchenette hidden behind a wall of animal pelts. For a moment, she disappeared behind it, and the only evidence that she hadn't left altogether was the clinks and trickles of a tumbler being filled with water. She returned a minute later with a bowl placed ahead of me, half-full with water dirtied by secrets, and a glass of her own. The room filled itself once more with pops of the fire's soot, the low hum of a water-side wind whipping up beyond the window, and beneath that trepidation was the tangible quiet that preceded a story yet told.

"My sister ..."

She hesitated, and I forced my back straight. Glare still locked on the witch, though somewhat softened by the remorse I saw her drowning under, I waited patiently, and listened.

"Elena is a broken woman," she started. "When I discovered these ... powers, if you could call them that ... she was the first to make sure I didn't grow beyond my shadow. She sniffled to our mother about how dangerous I was, and started riots on the school yard to ensure nobody would be caught dead speaking to me. And, like any teenager, I ran. I ran away from her, away from the murmurs of schoolchildren, away from the burning eyes of passers-by, to here, where we stand now."

An empty gesture towards the hut around us. It meant a great deal to her, once.

"But she found me, as she always does. It took her a decade, perhaps a little longer, but she found me. She was a lensmann, now. And when the strings of Fate put me in her path, there was no joy around our reunion. Instead, there was the glimmer of something different. It was far more powerful than mischief, but it hadn't quite fortified itself into evil."

I cocked my head, still stifling cold shivers, and she dropped her head. Every clause in her tale seemed to be torn from the cloth of a woman already in tatters.

"Magic is forbidden, you see, in this corner of Norway. Had the village's eyes fallen upon my corner of this forest, I would have been drowned. And there in front of me, of course, stood my sister, a playground bully turned law-enforcer, no less, and when she exchanged her compromise with me, she did it as the older sister, the victor, once more."

A sigh, and Gunnhild rose to her feet. Her skirt shuffled over the dust on the



floorboards, and creased as she bent to tend to the fire. When she raised herself upright again, she remained facing the fire, the tears I heard invisible to me.

"She promised to keep my existence a secret, to keep the other policemen and their dogs away from me, so long as she could use me as a vessel, use my power to get her the things she wanted. She used me to transform people, children, wanted for petty crimes, into animals, so she could claim that she had chased the peace's disturbances away. She used me to find a man that would love her, after an extra spoonful of sugar in his drink."

The air in the hut grew cold again, and Gunnhild turned to face me.

"And when she saw how much the town loved you, how much he loved you, his daughter, when she saw how much time he spent to see to you and your brother... oh, your poor brother... She used me to turn you into the creature you are now. Into the wolf she saw within, a predator to her idyllic fantasy yet to unfold, so that nothing ... nothing ... would any longer stand in her way."

I had stopped listening to the story a little while ago, until she mentioned Sam. The instinct grew in me again, to raise my claws to her throat, to run them down the length of her body and slice her neatly in two, until the realisation filled me, rather like how water fills a sinking ship, that my father had been the victim all along.

He had lost his wife, not two years ago, and found his son, my brother, Sam, afflicted by the same condition. He had brought us here, to Norway, to give Sam a new lease of life, to find a way to cure him, and instead had been seduced by the siren of the fjords, lost in the song of a woman soaked with insecurity, desperate to bear the child of a man who, by no natural means, would give her love.

"I know what you're thinking."

Snarls were snapping from my tongue, and my eyes had narrowed again, but she was right – she did know what I was thinking. It seems, somehow, she knew it better than I did.

The woman before me was a witch, the very witch who had transformed me into a wolf. Logical, then, it would be, that she could transform me back. I approached the table, lifted my forepaws to it – the closest thing I could enact to begging – and let my eyes lock deeply with hers as she sat herself down alongside me. I transmitted through the shivers in my fur the little girl that awaited within, the little girl that I was, longing only for her life to return, wherein she could go back to huffing at her father, caring for her brother, listening once more for the love of her new-found city.

But the witch gave a light shake of the head.

"I can't."

I dropped a paw to the floor, and let my back arch again. You can, I thought, holding down fury in my throat, you can and you will.



"Magic is ..."

She stood herself back up and turned away, running a finger through her hair.

"Magic is an ugly thing. And it cannot be undone by the simple muttering of a counter-spell. The gods themselves know that a mistake must be punished, that plain regret is not a just price for an impulsive curse."

She stepped to the fire once more, and this time I followed, followed her wistful gaze into the flames as they snapped at their frame.

"There is a way to undo the spell. I know this for I wrote it myself. But, oh, Lyall ..."

I looked up and saw a river of remorse flowing back from her eyes to mine. There was a pause, punctuated by a lone sigh.

"Your brother ... his name is Sam, yes?"

If there was a response in me, it hid behind a curtain of anticipation. After all, what did Sam have to do with this? With any of this?

"Lyall ... Lyall, the only way ..."

She fell to one knee, and brushed a hand over my cheek, her warmth muffled by a mixture of fur and sweat. Her voice fell heavy as she finished, the words falling to our feet like broken glass:

"The only way to reverse this curse ... is to drink his blood. You must drink the blood of your brother."

I stumbled back. This time, there was no hesitation. It burned through my skull, ran down my every nerve, my every vein, until I was shaking once more, though it was no longer from the cold. The Devil herself, the culprit to whom I own this wretched ego, was looking me in the eyes with the sole option of murdering my brother or living the remainder of my days as an animal. This time, the wolf's fury had tightened its fingers around me, pierced its strings through my limbs, and I no longer had the means to fight it. I no longer wished to fight it.

"I know what you want to do to me."

She repeated herself, and my ears became flush with the fire of blood.

"I beg of you ..."

Her voice dropped to a whimper, and my back arched with a fervour of its own. I was not given the chance to beg before she made me into this. My brother was not given the chance to beg before she made him her leverage. Yet I paused, if only to hear the sorrow come from her mouth.

In the end, what came was not the sorrow I expected.

A quiet sob. She lifted her head, exposing her neck. Her knuckles whitened as she gripped onto the chair, and her shuttered eyes dampened:

"Grant me your mercy."

MI5: Official Secrets

National Archives, London
Showing from : 5 April - 28 September 2025

Opening this Spring at The National Archives, *MI5: Official Secrets* will take visitors on a journey through pivotal moments in MI5's history, from its formation in the lead-up to the First World War, through the fight against fascism in the Second World War, exploring the spies and scandals of the Cold War, and then into the contemporary challenges of dealing with terrorism.

Showcasing a compelling collection of original case files, photographs and papers, alongside authentic espionage equipment used by spies and spy-catchers over the last 115 years, MI5: Official Secrets will offer a captivating glimpse into the world of British intelligence.

Among the fascinating stories being explored are never-before-seen papers being released by The National Archives today: namely the first-hand account of Kim Philby's confession in 1963; and papers related to the past activities of Cambridge spy Anthony Blunt.

The exhibition will also feature exclusive video insights from former MI5 directors general, intelligence experts including Professor Christopher Andrew, author of MI5's official history, and Baroness May, former prime minister and one of Britain's longest serving home secretaries.



Above: Workers at the Testing Laboratory checked post for secret messages during the First World War. Catalogue reference: KV 1/73

Sir Ken McCallum, Director General of MI5 said: "We are pleased to partner with The National Archives to share our history through *MI5: Official Secrets*.

"While much of our work must remain secret, this exhibition reflects our ongoing commitment to being open wherever we can."



By Theresa Thompson

Siena: The rise of painting, 1300-1350

National Gallery, London
Showing until: 22 June 2025

Sienese art, long overshadowed by that of Florence, its illustrious neighbour to the north, finally gets it place in the limelight this spring with the arrival of an exquisite exhibition at The National Gallery.

Siena: The Rise of Painting 1300-1350 covers the art of the first half of the 14th century when this bustling hill-top Tuscan city witnessed an explosion of creativity and innovation that proved a turning point in European art. Trecento masterpieces glow in gallery after gallery in this dazzling show. Paintings by the four key Sienese artists dominate - Duccio di Buoninsegna, Simone Martini, and the Lorenzetti brothers, Pietro and Ambrogio – have been brought together with elaborate works of art in a variety of media (metal-and-enamel, marble, ivories, rugs, silks, illuminated manuscripts) to explore "the evolution of an art that was distinctively local, but at the same time unquestionably international."

The exhibition is, in a sense, an ambitious evocation of Siena's golden age, a period that saw radical experimentation by painters in conceiving new types of objects, such as large multi-tiered altarpieces and personal devotional works, and a fundamental shift in narrative art towards a naturalism that pre-dates the Renaissance by up to a century. All of which made the artworks more accessible to people. And it made personalities of some of the artists; a few even signed their work, the first to do so.

Organised with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where the exhibition was first shown, in London there are over 100 beautiful master-works on display. This includes many panel paintings that were once part of altarpieces - polyptychs broken up at some point in their histories into smaller panel paintings illustrating individual scenes from the Bible.

Previous page: Simone Martini, The Angel Gabriel, about 1326-34, Tempera on poplar, Collection KMSKA - Flemish Community (public domain) (257), © Collection KMSKA - Flemish Community / photo Hugo Maertens



Left: Duccio, The Virgin and Child *enthroned with Angels, about 1290-5, Tempera on poplar, Kunstmuseum Bern (873), Legacy of Adolf von Stürler, Versailles, 1902 (G 0873), © Kunstmuseum Bern*

Happily, in the exhibition you can get right up close to these, to enjoy every astonishing detail.

I was in Heaven. No need for the celestial blue skies of later works (the figures here are mainly on gold ground); no need for the angels; nor the stories told; the jewel-like vibrancy of the colours of these early Sienese paintings, the sensitivity of the observations of human moods, gestures and postures, the sheer majesty of the works did it for me.

Let's start with Duccio (active by 1278–died 1318 in Siena), who unquestionably is the star artist of the show - and who opens the show with two small graceful works: a *Virgin and Child*, and *The Virgin and Child Enthroned*, both painted between 1290-1300, and both emphasising the emotional attachment of mother and son. Duccio's pioneering depictions of familiar human gestures and expressions - the baby pulling at his mother's veil, toes curling as he climbs

Right: Duccio, Maestà - Panels.
Top: The Annunciation, *© The National Gallery, London.*
Right, middle: Christ and the Woman of Samaria, *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (133 (1971.7)), © Copyright Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.*
Right, bottom: The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew, *Tempera and gold leaf on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1939.1.141), Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington*







on her - that is, he moves, as babies do – make the works far more relatable to its intended viewers. It's a far cry from the static depictions of mother and child in most mediaeval paintings; for comparison, a couple of earlier Italo-Byzantine icons are hung nearby.

Of the Duccio artworks here (15, amazingly, given that so few survive), the out-and-out highlight is the line of eight predella panels from his spectacular *Maestà* altarpiece (*Maestà* is Italian for majesty), specially reunited for the show. The monumental double-sided altarpiece known as the *Maestà*, painted by Duccio for Siena's cathedral, when completed in 1311 was paraded around the city streets in celebration before being installed above the high altar in the Duomo. There, it became the focus of Siena's devotion to the Virgin Mary, who was considered the protector of the city (it was held that she had intervened to save Siena at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260, when the smaller Sienese forces defeated their long-term enemy, the Republic of Florence).

The *Maestà*, the first double-sided altarpiece known to have been made and one of the largest and most complex, was dismantled in the late 18th century and many of the panels

scattered around the world. The panels on display (all from the back of the altarpiece) include *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (on loan from Madrid), *The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew* (on loan from Washington), and *The Annunciation* (from The National Gallery's collection). All were painted between 1308-11 in tempera and gold leaf on panel.



Lighting is key in this type of exhibition. And the National Gallery has got it just right. Entering each dark-walled gallery space feels to some extent like entering a chapel, as there in front of you, brilliantly lit, is an object to steal the eyes, to play with emotions, to wonder at.

Pausing before another gilded Duccio masterpiece, a beautiful triptych made around 1312 for a Cardinal's private devotions, co-curator of the exhibition Imogen Tedbury, the National Gallery's Curator of Italian Paintings before 1500, invites us to imagine the experience of opening one of these portable works. "They would have travelled packed shut. We know that the right wing opened first – you can tell from the hinges – and the first thing you'd see [in *The Virgin and Child*] is the Christ Child." The infant is clutching at his mother's veil as if trying to reveal her face more fully, while she is gently touching his knee. "It is an emotional experience, seeing the tenderness between the mother and child, and seeing in her face her sorrow at knowing what lies ahead for him," she adds. Candles may have been lit in front of the triptych, causing the gold

Above: Simone Martini, The Crucifixion*, about 1326-34, Tempera on poplar, Collection KMSKA - Flemish Community (public domain) (259), © Collection KMSKA - Flemish Community / photo Hugo Maertens*

to glisten and shine, enhancing the spiritual experience.

Duccio's pupil Simone Martini (around 1284-1344) shared Duccio's sensitivity. In turn he became Siena's star painter, and the principal recipient of civic commissions. One of his major works, the six panel Orsini polyptych, a folding work of art made between 1326-1334 for private devotion, was likewise divided up and scattered through Europe; it also has been reunited for the exhibition.

In a three decade-long career Martini became something of a celebrity painter. Even a kind of cultural ambassador to the cities and courts of Europe, ultimately at the papal court in Avignon in France. According to the exhibition curators, his work helped influence much of later French painting – and possibly too the Wilton Diptych, back on show at the National Gallery after touring as part of the National Gallery 200th anniversary celebrations last year. Pleasingly, there are 15 or so examples of Martini's lovely paintings on display, including the six panels made for Siena's government headquarters, the Palazzo Pubblico.

Before moving to the Lorenzetti bothers, I want to draw attention to a wonderfully relatable picture by Simone Martini of *Christ Discovered in the Temple,* painted in 1342, in which a gloriously truculent youth (Christ) with arms tightly folded, is brought home by his father to face up to his mother's worries. You can just hear him cry out, "What's the problem? I was only at the Temple!" You don't expect comedy from these pictures, but what a delight!



Above: Simone Martini, Christ Discovered in the Temple, *1342, Tempera on panel, National Museums Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery (2787), Presented by the Liverpool Royal Institution 1948, © National Museums Liverpool*

The two Lorenzetti brothers, Pietro (active possibly 1306; died



Above, left: Pietro Lorenzetti, Birth of the Virgin*, 1335-42, Tempera on panel, Museo dell'Opera della Metropolitana, Siena, © Foto Studio Lensini Siena.*

Above, right: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Madonna del Latte, *about 1325, Tempera on panel, Arcidiocesi di Siena - Colle di Val d'Elsa - Montalcino, Museo Diocesano, Siena © Foto Studio Lensini Siena*

probably 1348), and the younger Ambrogio (active 1319; died 1348/9), properly came into their own once Martini had left Siena, thereafter mostly gaining all the commissions. Stylistic differences exist between the brothers, but from the 17 or so works exhibited, it is clear that their work is often daringly innovative and emotionally powerful.

To take just two examples, one from each brother: look out for Pietro's triptych *The Birth of the Virgin,* painted in 1335, in which he side-steps the usual portrayals to have the mother, Saint Anne lying, recuperating on her side on a couch, watching her attendants bathe her newborn infant (note the delicate detail of the water pouring into the basin). Daringly, the background of his painting is no longer flat gold, but instead Lorenzetti innovates, painting an everyday environment, adding in architectural elements that sets his scene within a modest medieval household. All is normal, all is very relatable to the 14th century inhabitants of the city of Siena.

Meanwhile, Ambrogio's elegant painting of the *Madonna del Latte,* 1320-25, characterises the dynamic interplay of tender nursing mother and baby, the infant greedily sucking and



Above: Master of the San Galgano Crozier, Crozier, c.1315-1320, Gilded copper with enamel Museo dell'Opera della Metropolitana, Siena © Foto Studio Lensini Siena

Below: Tondino di Guerrino and Andrea Riguardi, Chalice, c. 1320, Gilded silver with translucent and champlevé enamel. The British Museum, London Purchased with a contribution from the Art Fund





Giovanni di Agostino, The Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine and John the Baptist*, about 1340-50, Marble with traces of polychromy and gilding, The Cleveland Museum of Art, In memory of Henry G. Dalton by his nephews, George S. Kendrick and Harry D. Kendrick (1942.1162), © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio*

kicking but at the same time checking on us. It also characterises what the curators hope this exhibition conveys, that progressiveness and naturalism is at the heart of 14th century Sienese art, and that early Sienese artists played a central role in the story of European art.

Siena's golden half century came to an abrupt end in the late 1340s with the arrival of the Black Death that ravaged Europe. By the time the plague finally left the city, it had lost between a third and half of its population, and the once thriving metropolis and artistic hub lost out to its neighbour, Florence culturally and economically.



Unknown Maker, Actor Playing Hamlet, Holding a Skull, 1860s, Tintype with applied colour, Case: 6 1/4 × 4 15/16 in. (15.8 × 12.6 cm), All photos: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, William L. Schaeffer Collection, Promised Gift of Jennifer and Philip Maritz, in celebration of the Museum's 150th Anniversary

The New Art: American Photography, 1839–1910

Metropolitan Museum, New York
Showing from: 11 April - 20 July 2025

This spring, The Metropolitan Museum of Art will present an adventurous new history of American photography from the medium's birth in 1839 to the first decade of the 20th century. Drawn from the Museum's William L. Schaeffer Collection—a magnificent recent promised gift to The Met by trustee Philip Maritz and his wife Jennifer—major works by lauded artists such as Josiah Johnson Hawes, John Moran, Carleton E. Watkins, and Alice Austen, will be presented in dialogue with extraordinary photographs by obscure or unknown practitioners made in small towns and cities from coast to coast.

The exhibition's many photographs by little-studied makers, early practitioners, and intrepid amateurs have been selected to reveal the artists' ingenuity, aesthetic ambition, and lasting achievement. In some 225 photographs—most never before seen—*The New Art: American Photography, 1839–1910* explores the nation's shifting sense of self, driven by the immediate success of photography as a cultural, commercial, artistic, and psychological preoccupation. The exhibition is made possible by the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund and the Diane Carol Brandt Fund with additional support is provided by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation.

"Through an impressive array of 19th- and early 20th-century images that capture the complexities of a nation in the midst of profound transformation, this exhibition offers something new even for those well-versed in the history of photography," said Max Hollein, The Met's Marina Kellen French Director and Chief Executive Officer. "Thanks to the generosity of Jenny and Flip Maritz, we can study and celebrate these formerly hidden treasures by hundreds of both known and unknown makers finally ready for their close-ups. Our hope is to give these works their



Above: Unknown Maker, Railroad Worker (?) with Wye Level*, c. 1870. Tintype with applied colour. Case (open): 6 5/16 × 10 3/8 in. (16 × 26.4 cm)*

rightful place in the ever-expanding history of the medium."

Jeff L. Rosenheim, Joyce Frank Menschel Curator in Charge of the Department of Photographs, added, "The camera and its myriad democratic products—rivalstothegreatestliterature of the era—are clearly the origin of modern communication and global image-sharing today. If we want to forge a deeper appreciation of contemporary art and the role of the camera in the lives of today's picture makers, we must recognize and respect the stunning visual power and authenticity of early American photography."

Carefully assembled over the last 50 years by the Connecticut collector and private dealer William L. Schaeffer, the collection includes splendid photographs in superb condition from every stage of the medium's early technical development: daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, salted paper prints, albumen silver prints, cyanotypes, platinum prints, and gelatin silver prints.

The exhibition also features an extensive display of three types of card-mounted photographs—cartes de visite, stereographs, and cabinet cards—each wildly popular in the mid- to late 19th century. When seen through binocular viewers, all the stereographs in the show will be visible in three dimensions.

Exhibition Overview

In 1839, the invention of photography transformed the world. In December of that year, when the first daguerreotypes were exhibited in New York, former mayor Philip Hone marvelled in his diary at what he described as "one of the wonders of modern times," adding that "like other miracles, one may almost be excused for disbelieving it without seeing the very process by which it is created."

The daguerreotype's remarkable ability to hold permanently an unimaginably detailed likeness on its surface—an image heretofore only seen fleetingly in a mirror—seemed in equal measure unbelievable and perfectly real, darkly mysterious yet scientifically verifiable, a shadowy fiction and yet a beautiful truth. The supernatural quality of the new art was noted by many around the world. As



Above: Alice Austen (American, 1866–1952), Group on Petria, Lake Mahopac, August 9, 1888*, Albumen silver print from glass negative 6 × 8 1/8 in. (15.2 × 20.7 cm)*



Above: Unknown Maker, Young Man with Rooster
1850s. Daguerreotype with applied colour
Case (open): 3 5/8 × 6 1/4 in. (9.2 × 15.9 cm)

one reviewer, writing for a Baltimore weekly in January 1840, admitted, "We can find no language to express the charm of these pictures painted by no mortal hand."

Photography arrived almost simultaneously with the steam locomotive, the steam ship, and the electric telegraph—all inventions that dramatically shortened the distances between people and places and forever changed the way civilizations communicate. The medium developed during the age of the type-crazy broadside, the morning and the evening newspaper, and the illustrated weekly. It was also the time of the birth of mercantile libraries (previously only the wealthy had access to books and libraries), and, not surprisingly, of eye strain. The era saw the medical specialization in the study of eye maladies and the development of optometry and ophthalmology. In 1835, just before the concurrent announcement of the invention of the new art in Paris and London, the American philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson noted in his private journal: "Our age is ocular."

Organized primarily by picture format across three galleries, *The New Art* illustrates what photography looked like for the average working citizen as well as those at the top of the economic scale. Exhibition visitors can see the clothes individuals wore at work and home, their attitudes to the camera singly and in groups, their ways of sitting or standing or touching, and how they honoured their children and respected their ailing and recently deceased family members. They can look at newly constructed storefronts,



Above: Unknown Maker Woman Wearing a Tignon, *c. 1850. Daguerreotype with applied colour. Case (open): 3 1/8 × 7 1/4 in. (8 × 18.4 cm)*

see how farmers worked their fields, and measure where new towns met the wilderness. They can observe the near total devastation of Native American communities, especially those living in the Plains, and confront the vicious cruelty of slavery and the influential role of the camera in the Civil War, still the crucible of American history.

In daguerreotypes, tintypes, and paper prints, viewers can also begin to see and comprehend how African Americans during the Civil War, throughout the Reconstruction era, and leading into the 20th century slowly began to replace negative stereotypes with positive self-images. This effort was explicitly nurtured by Frederick Douglass, who had long advocated visits to photography studios. In his nearly constant lecturing circuit across the country, he argued persuasively that no one could be truly free until each individual could sit for and possess their own photographic likeness. *In The New Art*, men and women of colour definitively hold the camera's attention and the viewer's as well.

Seen together in *The New Art*, the subjects in these photographs are not just sitters moulded by a camera operator, but the co-creators of their own portraits. One can see this clearly in their eyes and in their many small, seductive gestures. Confronting a photograph that left an artist's studio more than 150 years ago can be a humbling experience.

The magic of photography brings one face to face with the past, and the present is never more vital than it is in these early pictures. That is the medium's essence, its beauty, and its pathos.

Feature

By Sikeena Karmali Ahmed

Fatima Al-Fihri and Al-Qarawiyyin University

Fatima Al-Fihri (c. 800-880) was a Muslim woman, scholar and philanthropist who is credited with founding the world's oldest, continuously running university during the 9th century: the University of Al-Qarawiyyin, located in Fez in Morocco



Above: View of the Qarawiyyin Mosque on the skyline of central Fez. The green-tiled roofs of the prayer hall and the minaret (white tower on the left) are visible. Image: xiquinhosilva CC BY-SA 4.0

Born in Tunisia in the city of Qairouan (Kairouan), after which she named the mosque and educational institution that would later become a leading centre of intellectual exchange, Fatima Al-Fihri migrated with her family to the city of Fez, located in northern Morocco, as a young adult. During the 9th century the city of Fez grew into a thriving cosmopolitan centre of commerce, culture, scholarship and trade. It reached its apex as an intellectual, cultural and trade epicentre during the 13-14th centuries, while under the rule of the Berber Marinid Dynasty (1248-1465).

According to the historical chronicle *Rawd al-Qirtas* (*The Garden of Paper*) written during the 14th century by Ibn Abi Zar (d. 1315), Fatima's father, Muhammad al-Fihri al-Qayrawwani, was a successful Arab merchant, who hailed from the tribe of Quraysh (a famous Bedouin tribe that used to live in Mecca). Although not born into riches, Fatima and her sister Mariam inherited a vast fortune when her father, brother and husband all died within a short time span.

Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque (Jami' al-Qarawiyyin)

Uninterested in commerce and the accumulation of wealth, both sisters chose to invest instead in *sadaqah* – the Islamic idea of pious charity. Both used their inheritance to build mosques and schools in Fez. Mariam built the Al-Andalus Mosque, while Fatima built the Al- Qarawiyyin Mosque complex, which included a *madrasa; madrasa* is an Arabic word that refers to any kind of educational institution – both secular and religious, elementary or secondary. In the Muslim world, mosques often became community centres that were utilised not only for religious purposes, but also for social gatherings, charitable services, educational classrooms, market places, and even political rallies.

Fatima first purchased a plot of prime real estate, near the Suq al-'Attarin or Spice Market, in the centre of the city of Fez. On the first day of Ramadan in 859 she, along with her sister, laid the foundation for the mosque and adjacent *madrasa* – perhaps unaware at that time that it would become the world's first degree granting



Above: The oldest university of the world, Al Qarawiyine university in Fès. Image: Abdel Hassouni, CC BY-SA 4.0

university; or perhaps she knew it all along. Fatima named the mosque after her birthplace, the city of Qairouan in Tunisa. Qarawiyyin means "belonging to the people of Qairouan."

The architectural design and layout of Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque was ambitious to say the least. Fatima employed the most skilled engineers and craftsmen of the times, and

used materials of the highest quality. Following classical Islamic architectural layout for a mosque complex, Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque included a large ceramic-tiled courtyard that housed a fountain basin for the faithful to perform their ablutions before prayer. A customary arcade both frames the courtyard and ventilates the interior spaces, which lead to the large prayer hall. In addition to the tall minaret from which a muezzin would call the believers to prayer, the mosque also housed a library and separate praying quarters for women. The mosque also housed a library and separate praying quarters for women.



Above: Figure of Fatima Al-Fihri from the Jordan Museum. Image: Anass Sedrati (CC BY-SA)

Historians believe it took about two years, from 857 to 859, to construct the main buildings of the Al- Qarawiyyin Mosque, under the patronage of Fatima, who it is said, oversaw every detail of architecture and craftsmanship herself. Between 1134 and 1143, the Almoravid ruler, Sultan 'Ali ben Yusuf further expanded the mosque complex to its current size. Sa'did Sultan 'Abdallah ibn al-Shaikh added additional fountains and blue tiles to the courtyard between 1606 and 1623.

Some scholars suggest that some teaching and instruction probably took place at al-Qarawiyyin Mosque from a very early period or from its beginning. Major mosques in the early Islamic period were typically multi-functional buildings where teaching and education took place alongside other religious and civic activities. From its very early days, the mosque housed a neighbourhood madrasa. Over time, the Qarawiyyin madrasa developed into an institution of higher learning that attracted famous scholars from all over the Muslim world, and later even from medieval Europe.

Becoming a University

Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Qarawiyyin became an important place of higher learning, many historical accounts and travelogues mention the quality, breadth and scope of its teaching. *Halaqas* – meaning circles of learning referring to the organisation of *madrasa* classrooms where students sat in a semi-circle around their teacher, are mentioned from both the 10th and 12th centuries.

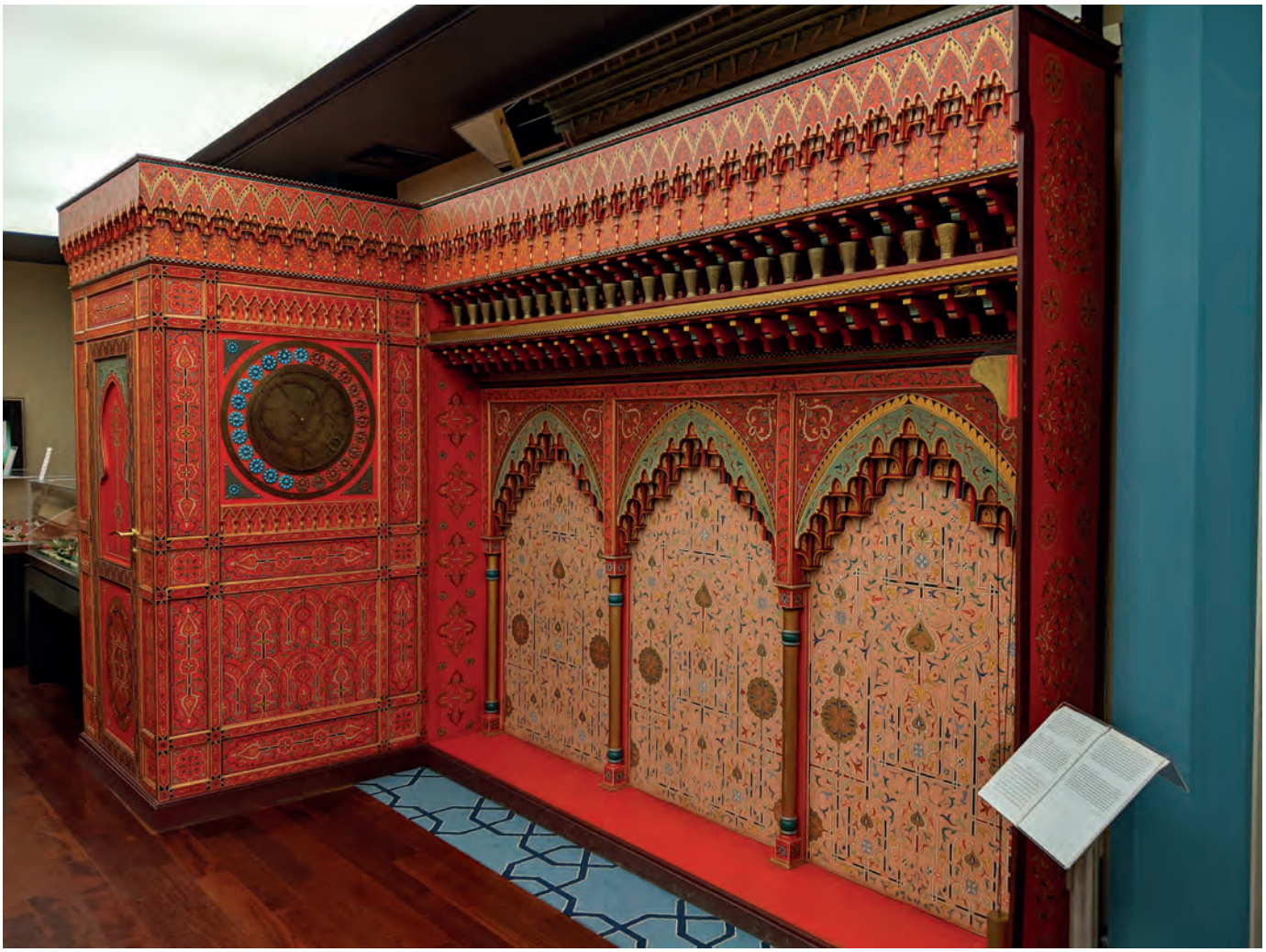
The Moroccan historian and ambassador Abdelhadi Tazi (1921-2015) suggests that the earliest written record of teaching Al-Qarawiyyin is from 1141; while his fellow historian and countryman Mohammed Al-Manouni mentions that the mosque became a formal place of higher education, that granted qualifying certificates to scholars, between 1040-1147, during Almoravid rule. As such, most historians agree that Al-Qarawiyyin was the world's first-degree granting institution, as well as a leading centre of scientific debate and scholarship that is a university. It set the standard that would become the reference point for institutions of higher learning the world over, drawing visitors, students and lecturers from all over the world.

Most scholars, however, consider that Al-Qarawiyyin reached its zenith as a centre of intellectual excellence – both in the secular sciences and philosophy and in religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*qalam*) during the 13th and 14th centuries. It was during this time that its research and scholarship were at their most ambitious, drawing scholars from all over the Muslim world including Central Asia, South Asia, the Levant, and the Hejaz.

... many historical accounts and travelogues mention the quality, breadth and scope of its teaching...

The university's curriculum included but was not limited to Quranic exegesis (tafsir), Islamic jurisprudence, algebra, astronomy, botany, cartography and geography, grammar, history, literature, logic, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, physics and a host of foreign languages including Greek and Latin. Notably, the mosque complex also thrived as a spiritual centre where Islamic mysticism (Sufism) and *gnosis* (*irfan)* thrived.

Traditionally, the student body was comprised of boys and men, however



Above: Water Clock, Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque. Image: Mustafa-trit20 (CC BY-SA)

girls and women who were interested in learning were provided with spaces in a special gallery (*riwaq*) that overlooked the students' circle and from where they could listen to the discussion and write questions on paper to be sent to the teacher and on showing an interest would receive individual tuition. Fatima al-Fihri is said to have studied Islamic Jurisprudence and mathematics at her own institution.

Decline

By the 18th century, the curriculum at Al-Qarawiyyin had dwindled in scope, focusing increasingly on the traditional Islamic curriculum and Arab language and literature. Even Islamic philosophy, Quranic exegesis and mysticism had been eschewed in favour of a stricter and more orthodox and didactic approach. By 1789, the 'Alawi sultan Muhammad ibn Abdallah, had already issued



Above: Scholar at the Al-Qarawiyyin library, c. 1953

strict limitations on the university's programmes, discontinuing classes in astronomy and medicine while slowly steering the faculty away (it dwindled from 426 members to 266 with only about 100 still teaching classes) from more secular scholarship on logic and philosophy, even banning key Sufi teachings. Sultan Abd al-Rahman followed in his footsteps in 1845, adjudicating further "reforms" to the curriculum.

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Al-Qarawiyyin's famous library, which scholars came from around the world to consult, also suffered neglect resulting in a large portion of the collection being lost. From thousands of books and manuscripts on diverse disciplines and in a host of languages, the collection at the beginning of the 20th century numbered around 1,600 manuscripts and 400 printed books.

The Library

Currently, among the most notable manuscripts in the library collections are volumes from the famous Al-Muwatta collection of *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammed) by Imam Malik ibn Anas (711-795) that is inscribed with ink on gazelle parchment, the *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* (Biography of the Prophet) by Ibn Ishaq (704-768), Ibn Khaldun's (1332-1406) historical opus the *Muqaddimah* as well as the original manuscript of his book *Al-'Ibar*. There is also a famous Quran that was donated to the library in 1602 by the Saadi Sultan, Ahmad al-Mansur.

In 2012, the Al-Qarawiyyin Library was rehabilitated and curated by well-known Moroccan architect Aziza Chaouni who discovered Fatima al-Fihri's own manuscript collections as well as a copy of her diploma from Al-Qarawiyyin in fiqh and mathematics. Since the completion of renovations, the library has been open to the public and includes "exhibition room for manuscripts, a small museum to showcase the history of the Qarawiyine complex, a laboratory for the treatment of old books, and a cafe." (azizachaouniprojects.com).

Famous Scholars

Many of the scholars who studied at Al-Qarawiyyin have had a strong impact on the intellectual and academic history of the Muslim world. Among these are Al-Biruni (973-1048), a polymath who made major contributions to mathematics, physics, astronomy, and geography; Al-Idrisi (1100-1165) the cartographer whose maps were eagerly studied by Renaissance geographers; Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185) who wrote the world's first science fiction novel as well as a treatise on self-led learning called Hayy ibn Yaqzan; Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) translator and commentator of Aristotle known in Europe as Averroes; the Jewish scholar and mystic Maimonides (1138-1204) who would have a profound influence on Jewish philosophy and theology;

the astronomer Al-Bitruji (d.1204) known in Europe as Alpetragius; Ibn Al-Arabi (1165-1240) the Sufi mystic, philosopher and poet; the historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) whose work laid the foundations for modern sociology, history political economy; and Hassan al-Wazzan (c. 1494 - c. 1554) aka Leo Africanus who wrote the first definitive book on Africa in Latin for a European readership, *The Description of Africa*.

European scholars began to read the work produced at Al-Qarawiyyin in Latin translation, making the university highly esteemed among certain circles. Christian monks and scholars began to visit the madrasa. These visiting scholars included the Flemish Deist and grammarian Nicolas Cleynaerts (1495-1542) who died at the Alhambra. The famous Pope, Sylvester II (999-1003), who was born Gerbert of Auvergne (930-1003), brought with him the use of the zero and Arabic numerals after studying at Al-Qarawiyyin. Later, during the 16th century, the Arabist and translator Jacob van Golius (1596 –1667) would also study at the university.

Oldest University in the World

Places of higher learning of course existed all over the world long before the 9th century, however Al-Qarawiyyin University is noted as the world's oldest continuously operating



Above: The Travels of Leo Africanus, 1507-1520. Map by Simeon Netchev (CC BY-NC-ND)



Left: A document from the Qarawiyyin's library which is claimed by some scholars to be the world's oldest surviving medical degree, issued in 1207 CE

university by UNESCO and Guinness World Records, amongst others. The world's second oldest known university that is still operating was founded in the Italian city of Bologna 230 years later, that is the University of Bologna.

All the same, certain mediaeval historians considered the university (from Latin *universitas*) to be an institution of higher learning that was specifically Christian and European. Therefore, they hold that the earliest universities are all located in Western Europe, naming the University of Paris and the University of Bologna as the oldest universities. These same sources consider Al-Qarawiyyin to have been a *madrasa* – that is, an institution of higher education teaching Islamic jurisprudence and law, with only a passing interest in the sciences, mathematics, physics and so on. They argue that universities were only founded outside of Western Europe as a consequence of modernisation programmes carried out by colonial and post-colonial regimes. However, the Italian historian Yahya Pallavicini counters this narrative by contending that the model of the university was not found in Europe until the 12th century, but existed throughout the Muslim world from the founding of Al-Qarawiyyin in the 9th century until at least the early years of European colonialism.

Modern Naming

The Arabic letter Qāf which functions as a voiced sound without an equivalent transliteration in Latin script – the "awiyyi" triphthong which



Above: One of the Saadian pavilions (late 16th and early 17th century) in the courtyard, featuring carved wood and stucco decoration. Image: Ahmed.magdy, CC BY-SA 4.0

is difficult to pronounce, as well as the French colonization of Morocco have produced a varied to different Latin script transliterations and spellings of the university's name, including Al Quaraouiyine and Al-Karaouine in French orthographic style. The anglicised rendering of Al-Qarawiyyin has now become standard.

Becoming a State University

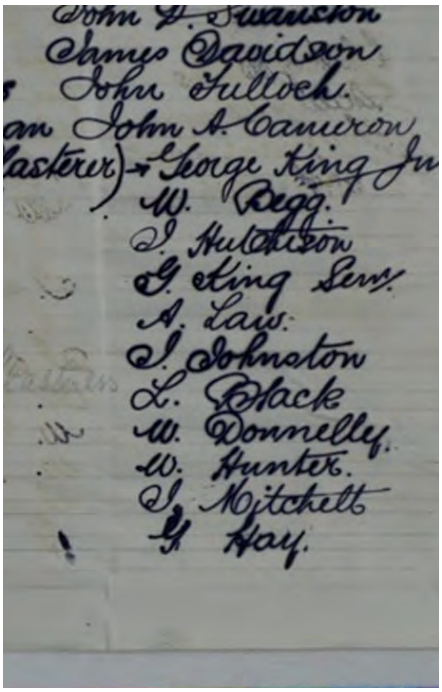
By 1912, when Morocco became a French protectorate, Al-Qarawiyyin was already in decline, both as a centre of Islamic learning and as a secular university, becoming instead more of a place of higher education for employees in the then sultan's administration. Under French rule, the university saw structural reform between 1914 and 1947. Nevertheless, the curriculum was still steered towards a conservative reading of Islamic religious education. Simultaneously, or perhaps because of this, the student body declined, and the Moroccan classes who could afford it, studied instead at newly established colleges and universities that followed the Western European model and adopted a similar curriculum, with the language of instruction being French rather than Arabic.

It was in 1947 that Al-Qarawayyin became part of the state administered education system, and in 1963, following independence, it became an officially state-run university under the Ministry of Education. The newly established state University of Al-Qarawiyyin now housed four new faculties and adopted a modern curriculum and textbooks along with founding a college for training professional teachers. Its new name was now "The University of Al-Qarawiyyin". After 1975, the university reverted to a curriculum of Islamic religious studies and the more secular "general studies" courses moved to the new Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University. In 1988, King Hassan II (r. 1961-99) re-established the teaching of the traditional Islamic sciences including law, theology and jurisprudence.

In June 2015, a royal decree declared the university as a public institution devoted to higher education and scientific research, with its own legislature ensuring financial, educational and scientific/programmatic independence. Today, the university's most sought after degrees are in Arabic languages and literature, Islamic studies, and Moroccan culture and history. The student body is made up of people from all over North and West Africa as well as Francophone students interested in the history of the Maghreb.

During the modern period, women have been able to attend the university and graduate with a degree since as early as the 1930s. Adjacent to the university, the mosque complex founded by Fatima al-Fihri preserves its place as the Jami' Masjid or main Friday mosque and community centre.

Message in a bottle hidden above historic Scottish theater's stage, untouched for nearly 120 years



A theater patron found the glass bottle behind a decorative crown positioned 40 feet above the stage. The note was dated 1906, the year the King's Theater opened in Edinburgh. Smeared with paint and sealed with a glob of plaster, the small glass bottle contained a rolled-up piece of paper. The scroll contained a list of contractors who worked together to build the King's Theatre, including draftsmen, architects, plasterers and apprentices. **Read more**

Sole portrait of England's 'nine-day queen' thought to have been identified by researchers



'Compelling evidence' suggests figure is Lady Jane Grey, making it only known depiction made before 1554 execution. Known as the "nine-day queen" and used as a pawn in the ruthless ambition that defined the Tudor court, historians have struggled to find a single portrait of Lady Jane Grey that was painted during her lifetime.

Now, research by English Heritage suggests a mysterious portrait depicts the royal queen. **Read more**

'Find of a lifetime': 15th-century gold and silver coins discovered by amateur metal detectorists



Amateur metal detectorists have discovered a 600-year-old treasure trove of gold and silver coins they're calling "the find of a lifetime", near the village of Cappercleuch, in the Scottish Borders region.

Some of the coins were English silver groats, minted by both Henry V (ruled from 1413 to 1422) and Edward IV (ruled from roughly 1461 to 1483), while others were Scottish gold demy and half-demys, minted by James I of Scotland (reigned from 1406 to 1437) and James II (ruled from 1437 to 1460). The coins were marked with the likeness of each monarch at the time of their minting. An initial investigation by archaeologists revealed that the coins may have been left at the site in the early- to mid-1460s. **Read more**

Bone fragments of oldest known human face in Europe found in Spain

Bone fragments unearthed at an ancient cave in Spain belong to the oldest known human face in western Europe, researchers say.

The fossilised remains make up the left cheek and upper jaw of an adult member of an extinct human species who lived and died on the Iberian peninsula between 1.1m and 1.4m years ago. The discovery suggests that at least two forms of early human occupied the region in the early Pleistocene, when the cave sat within humid woodland rich in wildlife and crossed with rivers and streams.

"This paper introduces a new actor in the story of human evolution in Europe," said Dr Rosa Huguet of the University of Rovira i Virgili who helped uncover the fossils. **Read more**

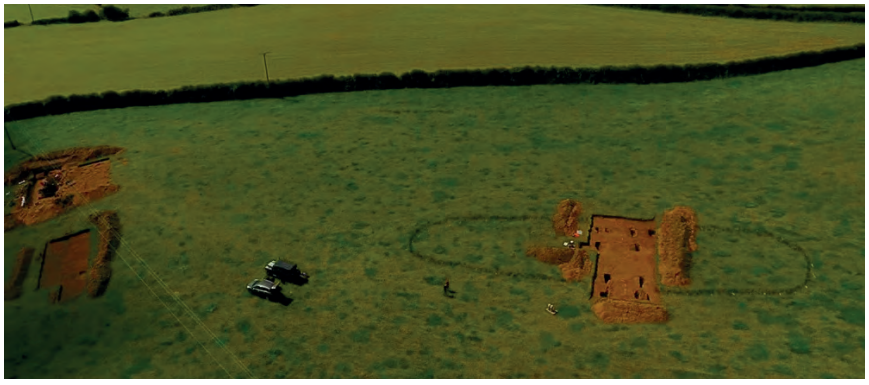


Scientists reveal how Vesuvius turned a Roman man's brain into glass



Archaeologists working in Herculaneum in 1969 discovered the remains of a young man whose brain and parts of his spinal cord had been turned into glass. Scientists had never seen a glassy soft tissue in nature before—and no one has found anything like it since. And now, researchers have put forth an explanation for how this incredibly rare phenomenon—known as vitrification—might have happened, **Read more**

Britain's largest known Viking-age building discovered beneath a family farm



With the help of more than 50 volunteers, archaeologists say they have identified the largest Viking-Age building ever excavated in Britain—a rare insight into the early medieval period's Anglo-Scandinavian culture. The structure was buried beneath a field at High Tarns Farm in Cumbria, and researchers identified the remnants of a "large hall"—measuring roughly 160 feet long and 50 feet wide—last summer. **Read more**

New find links the Sutton Hoo helmet to Denmark





Left: Peter Pentz with the Tåsinge patrice. Photo: John Fhær Engedal Nissen, The National Museum of Denmark

Above: The patrice from Tåsinge in Denmark with a motif that connects it to the iconic Sutton Hoo helmet. Photo: The National Museum of Denmark

The iconic Sutton Hoo helmet is one of Great Britain's most iconic finds, often referred to as the 'British Tutankhamen'. It was previously believed to come from Uppland in Sweden, where helmets decorated with mounted warriors like one of the motifs on the helmet have been found. But a new detector find in Tåsinge bears a striking resemblance to one of the motifs on the helmet from Sutton Hoo, which could change our understanding of the origins of the helmet and the power balance in Northern Europe around 600 CE.

The helmet was buried in Southeast England at beginning of the 7th century as part of an elaborate ship burial worthy of a king. It did not see the light of day again until it was discovered during an archaeological excavation in the area in 1939. The helmet was in hundreds of pieces, but experts were able to reassemble the fragments, including the motif of a mounted warrior with a man lying under the horse.

The same motif has now been traced to Tåsinge in the Southern Funen archipelago, where a special kind of stamp known as a *patrice* has been found by a detectorist. A thin sheet of metal is placed on top of the *patrice* then hammered to create the same motif on the metal. The stamp was handed in at Svendborg Museum and then sent to

the National Museum of Denmark where museum curator Peter Pentz has studied it in detail.

Comparing the motif on the newly discovered *patrice* from Tåsinge to the mounted warrior on the Sutton Hoo helmet and those from Sweden, it is clear that the Tåsinge *patrice* is much closer to the one on the helmet than the Swedish motifs.

Similarities can be seen in the details, such as the cuff at the warrior's wrist, the warrior's hair, the almond-shaped harness fitting on the horse's head, its reins, the sword protruding below the warrior's shield, and the 'bunions' or circles on the feet of the man lying down. The Swedish equivalents have a wild boar or bird of prey on the helmet, something not seen the Sutton Hoo helmet or the new find from Tåsinge.

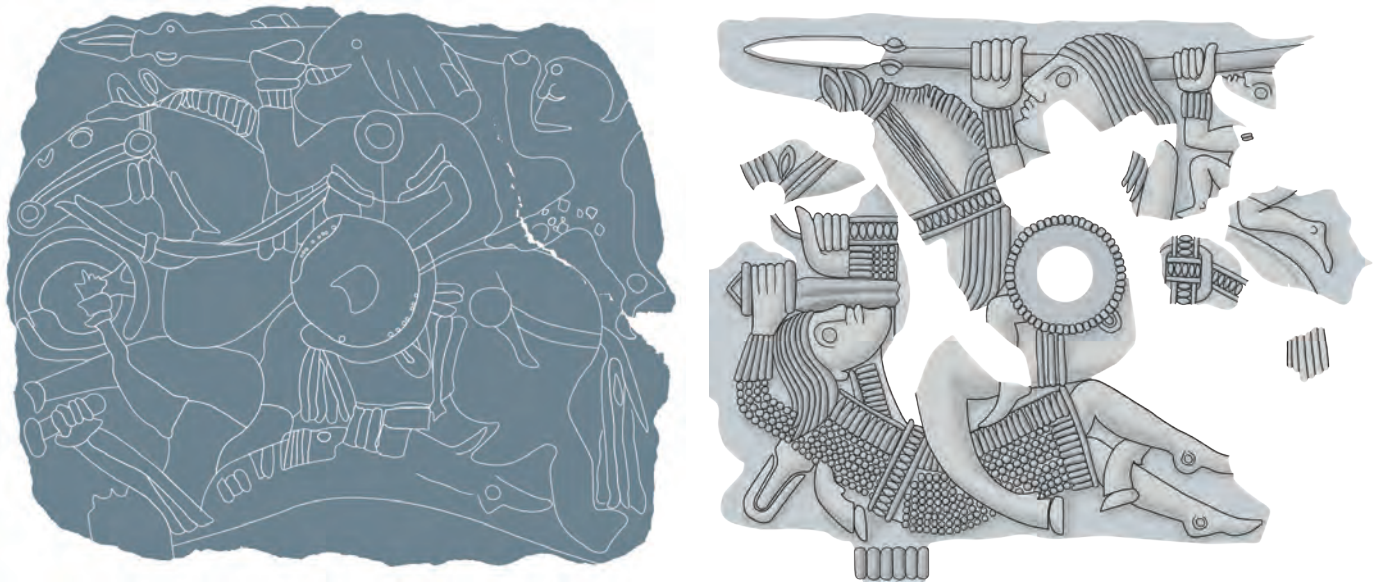
According to Pentz, curator at the National Museum of Denmark, this could mean the famous helmet is more likely to have been made in Denmark than Sweden:

"The Sutton Hoo helmet is iconic worldwide. It is a national treasure for the British on a par with the chariot of the sun for Danes. It would be sensational if this helmet, obviously worn by someone of great importance, possibly a king, was made in Tåsinge. It points to a possible Danish connection to the helmet, but also to the person who wore and was buried with it."





Above, left: Sutton Hoo replica. Above, right: Sutton Hoo replica, seen from one side.
Both photos: The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license)



Above, left: Motif from 'patrice' found on Tåsinge, Denmark, similar to motif on the iconic Sutton Hoo helmet. Illustration: Mads Lou Bendtsen, The National Museum of Denmark. Above, right: Motif of riding warrior from the Sutton Hoo helmet. Illustration: Goran tek-en, Wikipedia, license CC-BY-SA 4.0.

ANOTHER POSSIBLY IDENTICAL MOTIF

The connection between Tåsinge and Sutton Hoo could turn out to be even stronger. In addition to the first motif of a mounted warrior, there is another mounted warrior on the helmet. Here, however, only a few fragments have been found, so it has not been able to reassemble it in full.

Close examination of the details on these fragments, however, reveals an even stronger match with the Tåsinge motif than the fully reassembled motif on the Sutton Hoo helmet. According to Peter Pentz, two details are particularly striking.

The first is the lines by the horseman's foot, which are the same on the stamp and fragment, but absent from other motifs. The second is the edge of the shield of the man lying down, which is the same on the stamp and the fragment.

The striking similarity between the fragmented motif and the *patrice* could mean that they might not only come from the same area but were also made by the same group of craftsmen. Pentz says:

"Despite being made in very different places, many motifs are clearly inspired by each other. But when the likeness is as strong as it is here, it could mean that they were not only made in the same place but even by the same craftsmen. That could provide strong evidence that the Sutton Hoo helmet was actually made in Tåsinge, which would make it an incredible find."

Exactly how close the two are can hopefully be established by a planned 3D scan of the *patrice* and fragments.

WAS DENMARK A REGIONAL SUPERPOWER?

If the Sutton Hoo helmet was actually made in or around Tåsinge this would change former understandings of the role Denmark played in the power balance in Northern Europe around the year 600.

No traces of the magnificent burial sites discovered in England and Sweden from this period have been found in Denmark, which has led some to conclude that the Danish region played no significant role.

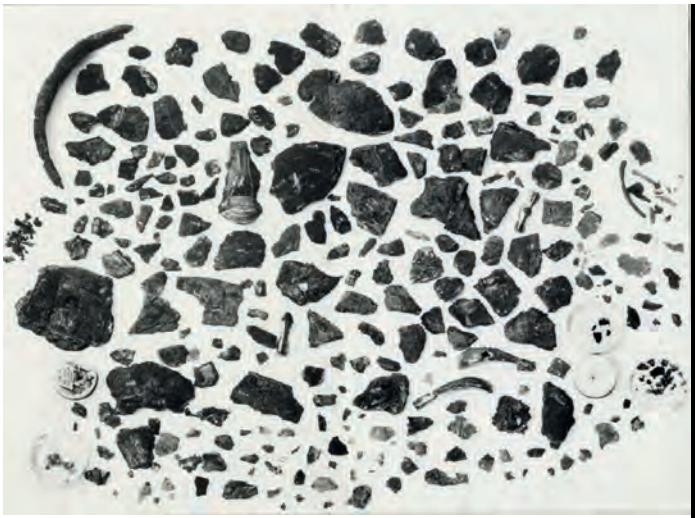
According to Pentz, however, the new find establishes a much stronger basis for thinking Denmark was relatively powerful during this period, maybe even one of Northern Europe's leading powers.

Some experts have previously argued that England and Sweden could have been outposts of a Danish power base in the 7th century, and that the iconic helmets and ship burials found here can be seen as expressing a strong affiliation to Denmark as a central power.

This theory is strengthened by the find in Tåsinge, but it cannot stand alone. As Pentz adds, a small stamp that is only 4.5 cm wide could have travelled far and wide.

"It is still too early to draw any conclusions, but it does indicate that Denmark played a more important role during this period than previously assumed. We often attribute the uniting of the kingdom to Harald Bluetooth in the 10th century, but Denmark could have been relatively united and powerful as early as 600 CE. It is a find that challenges previous theories, and that is always exciting," he says.

The stamp is now on display at the National Museum of Denmark.





Above, left: Fragments from the Sutton Hoo helmet before it was reassembled. Photo: The British Museum, CC-BY-SA 4.0

Right: The Sutton Hoo helmet.
Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Special Feature

The Melsonby Hoard

The Melsonby Hoard is a highly significant discovery of Iron Age metalwork from nearly 2,000 years ago, discovered in late December 2021 by metal detectorist Peter Heads in a field near Melsonby, North Yorkshire. In collaboration with the British Museum and Historic England, Durham University's Department of Archaeology and Archaeological Services team excavated the site and oversaw the preservation of the artefacts discovered there, then began analysis of this historic find



Above: The Melsonby Hoard during excavations. All images: University of Durham



Above: Objects in the hoard are carefully excavated

THE FIND AND EXCAVATION

In late December 2021, metal detectorist Peter Heads was scanning a field in Melsonby, North Yorkshire, northern England, with the landowner's permission.

There he made a surprising discovery - a deposit of well-preserved metalwork buried underground.

Realising that the objects appeared to be of archaeological significance, Peter immediately contacted Professor Tom Moore of Durham University's Department of Archaeology.

After inspecting the site, Professor Moore realised this was likely to be a 'treasure case' and the relevant authorities at the Portable Antiquities Scheme and the British Museum were alerted. Recognising the potential significance of the find, Professor Moore and Peter Heads agreed that a team from Durham University would return in 2022 to conduct an excavation to determine the nature of the discovery.

Historic England was also contacted and agreed to fund the excavation and subsequent analysis and conservation of the artefacts. The aim of this work was to understand the nature of the discovery and address questions about how and why these finds were deposited where they were.

EXCAVATING THE FIND

Excavations were carried out by a team from Durham's Department of Archaeology and the University's professional Archaeological Services team. They were advised by Dr Sophia Adams, curator of First Millennium



Above: 'The block' containing remnants of Iron Age metalwork corroded together into a mass

European and Roman Conquest period Collections, at the British Museum, and received support from Historic England.

Two trenches were opened to uncover what turned out to be two deposits discovered by Peter Heads.

In one trench the archaeological team uncovered a hoard of over 800 fragments of Iron Age metalwork, one of the largest deposits ever found in Britain. The second deposit was a smaller hoard but with a similar range of material. It's thought the objects had been buried around 2,000 years ago.

Excavation of the main deposit was painstaking work, involving meticulous 3D digital recording of the deposit as it was excavated, which was crucial to understanding the nature of the find.

PRESERVATION OF THE ARTEFACTS

Preservation of the artefacts was a priority and was overseen by Dr Emily Williams, specialist conservator and Associate Professor in Durham's Department of Archaeology.

The complicated and dense nature of the deposit, where some artefacts had stuck fast to one another, meant that the excavation was necessarily slow and careful. The second deposit had become a concreted, tangled mass of metal objects and soil. However, because of

its smaller size, the team was able to remove this as a single large block, for careful excavation in the conservation laboratories in Archaeology at Durham University.

It took the team two months to fully excavate the two trenches and safely recover all the deposited items. It has taken many more months for the block to be carefully examined to reveal the artefacts within.

ARTEFACTS

The deposits at Melsonby included a vast amount of ironwork and copper alloy items, with most of the artefacts being associated with horse harness and Iron Age vehicle parts.

The horse harness included items such as bridle bits, yoke fittings and terrets (the loops for reins to pass through), many richly decorated, with coral and coloured glass.

The vehicle parts included linchpins and no less than 28 iron tyres. They were found with other metalwork pieces suggesting that they may have been parts of four-wheeled wagons, rather than better-known two-wheeled chariots.

The combination and scale of such finds is very unusual in Britain and this deposit appears to represent the pieces of at least seven of these vehicles.

In addition to the horse harness and vehicle parts, the deposits also included two large vessels for drinking and feasting and spearheads. One of the vessels is a large cauldron, the other is decorated in a style which suggests Mediterranean influences on the designs.





Above: Cheek ring and mouthpiece fragment from a copper alloy bridle bit from the Melsonby Hoard

Left: A detail of copper alloy objects, including lynch pin and harness fittings

DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION?

Several objects show signs of having been subjected to intense heat before burial, although there is no indication of them being burnt where they were found.

Several pieces of partially melted copper alloy objects were found at different locations within the deposit and charcoal had stuck to some surfaces. Initial surface examination of the iron tyres suggested they may have been burnt.

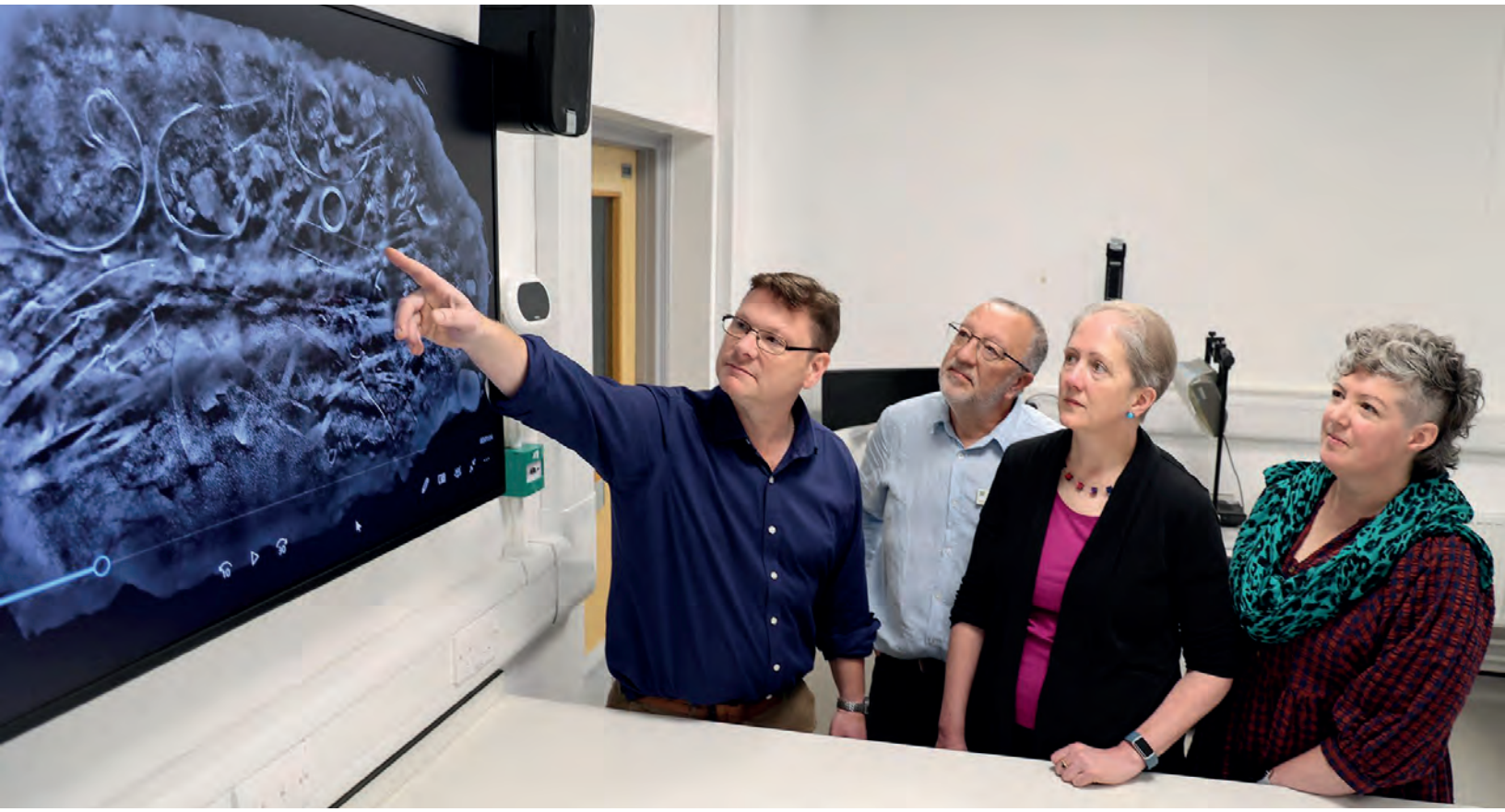
The wooden components of the iron wheels appear to have been broken away before being deposited, and perhaps burnt out. Many of the objects have been bent out of shape and apparently deliberately put out of use.

The tyres, for example, were severely buckled and the cauldron was placed upside down and appears to have been deliberately stoved in with a large boulder. This may suggest that the material from trench one was placed on a funerary pyre or burnt for some other reason before it was deposited.

While the act of burning and burying these objects may have been related to a funeral, this was not a grave as no human remains were found within the deposit. Instead, these objects represent the deliberate destruction of



Above: A copper alloy bridle bit being cleaned under a microscope



Above: The Melsonby Hoard team looking at a CT scan, produced by MUVIS, University of Southampton, of the block of artefacts. Left to right, Professor Tom Moore, Head of Durham University's Department of Archaeology, Dr Keith Emerick, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England, Dr Emily Williams, Durham Department of Archaeology and Dr Sophia Adams, Curator, British Museum

huge amounts of wealth and perhaps indicate a commemorative feast to mark a significant event.

This consumption and destruction of objects is of a scale rarely seen in the Iron Age in Britain and may change our understanding of how wealth and status were expressed at this time.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Melsonby Hoard has been limited by the treasure case process and is only just beginning.

However, it is known that it is a highly significant discovery, acting almost like an archaeological time capsule from the Iron Age, around 2,000 years ago. Initial assessment suggests the objects were buried in the first century CE near the time of the Roman Conquest of Southern Britain.

Intriguingly, it seems that the vehicles found at Melsonby might have their closest parallels in European Iron Age vehicles from France, Denmark and Germany.

The two large vessels found at either end of the metalwork deposit in trench one were intentionally placed upside down. They include a large cauldron and a more enclosed vessel with highly decorated shoulders that has similarities to the Mediterranean wine-mixing bowls known as Lebes.



Above: The cauldron, found upside down with a large stone crushing the centre inwards

The cauldron bears some similarities to examples from Leicestershire in the Midlands of England, and from Wiltshire in southern England. However, those finds are not as large as the Melsonby cauldron, which retains unique features including elaborate fish motifs depicted in the base, that are very unusual for the period. The swirling pattern surrounding the fish echoes the late first millennium BCE art style adorning metalwork from Europe, described as La Tène style.

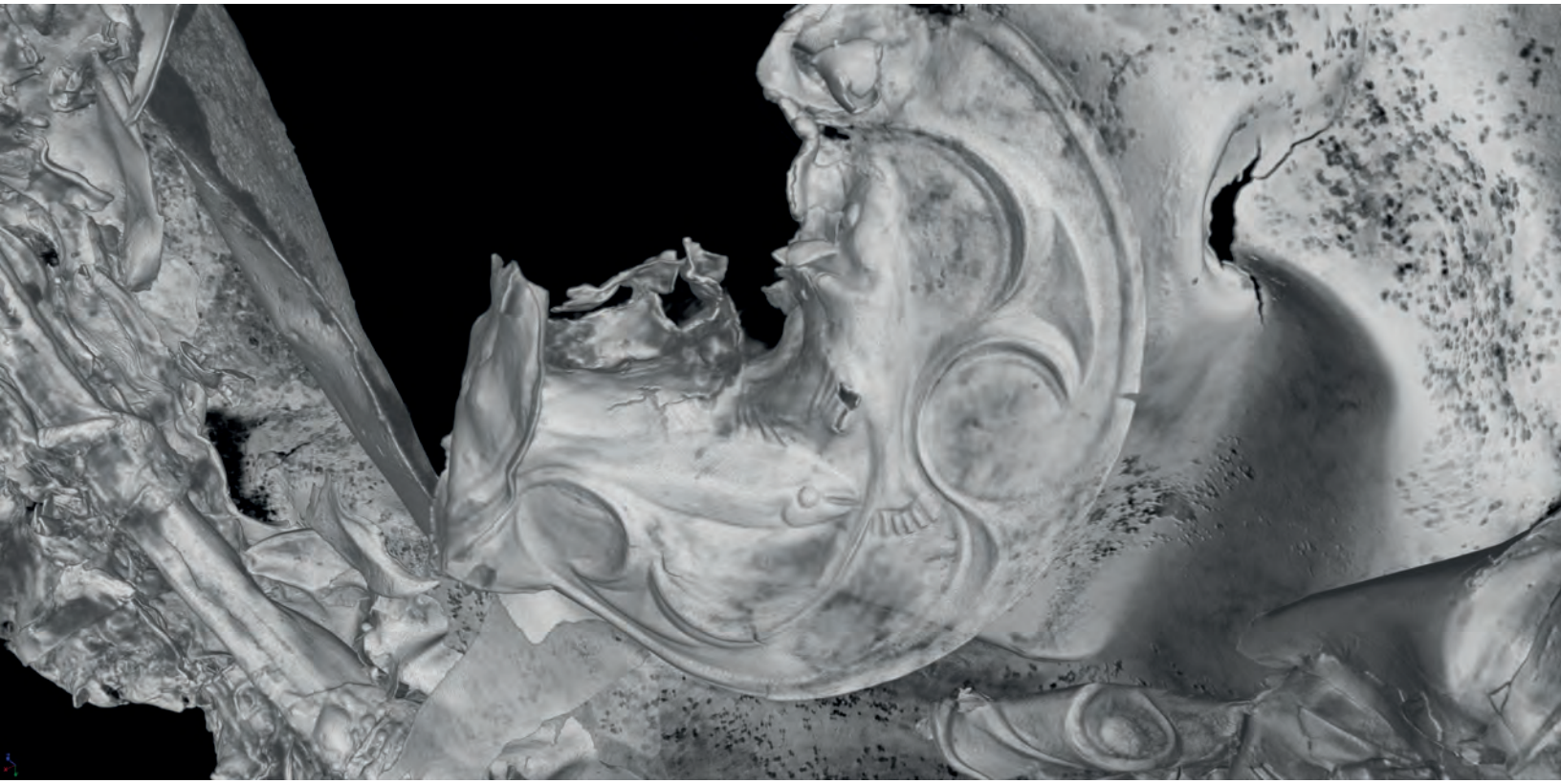
The wine-mixing bowl has parallels in Etruscan vessels and is decorated with coral beads or studs and two cast copper alloy masks of human faces.

BONE, CORAL AND GLASS

Weaponry is represented in the hoard in the form of iron socketed spear heads and the boss and spine of a shield, which has similarities with finds from fourth to second century BCE Iron Age cemeteries in East Yorkshire.

The hoard also included a large iron mirror with a double looped, forged handle.

Several other tubular copper alloy objects can be seen encased in the block. The purpose of these is unclear. They could be adornments for the pole elements of vehicles or weapons. Their form is inconsistent with tubular instruments of the time lacking the



Above: CT scan of the base of the large Melsonby cauldron showing rare depictions of fish within swirling La Tène style decoration. Image: μ-VIS xray imaging centre, University of Southampton

diagnostic features of Iron Age carnyces and Roman cornu. For now, these remain a puzzle.

As well as metalwork, the hoard included one object made from carved bone (a possible decorative handle), coral fragments (mostly beads that are decorative features from the horse harness), and glass fragments that were decorative parts of other objects.

It is not currently possible to identify whether the objects in the hoard were manufactured locally or exchanged over long distances, but further materials analysis and comparison with collections, both in Britain and Europe, may offer more insights on that question.

THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MELSONBY HOARD

One of the key questions for future research is determining why the Melsonby Hoard was deposited where it was and for what reason?

The range, quantity and high-quality nature of the hoard represents significant wealth in the Iron Age. It reflects the likely status and power of the person or community who buried it.

The very deliberate destruction of much of the metalwork, together with the apparent burning of some artefacts, could also offer clues as to the purpose of the deposit.





Left, top: Overhead view of the excavations
Left, bottom: Close up of one of the two human faces decorating the shoulder of the lidded vessel from the Hoard, shown upside down as found during excavations

A SIGNIFICANT OCCASION

Destroying and burying such an extensive collection of material points to the marking of a significant occasion, while the evidence for burning may suggest it was related to a funerary pyre, perhaps for a cremation burial.

If so, it can be speculated that the hoard might have been associated with the death of a high-status individual. Perhaps some of the objects were included in a funerary pyre, and then buried with the rest of the hoard in a separate event to mark the occasion – though no human remains were found.

CONNECTIONS ACROSS EUROPE

The hoard also offers clues about the nature of society in Britain during the late first century BCE and first century CE, and in particular challenges long-held views of the Iron Age of southern Britain being wealthier and more developed than that in the north. While most people in northern Britain at this time were farmers,

the Melsonby Hoard emphasises that society included expert craftspeople and elites who could commission and obtain vast amounts of wealth and prestigious objects.

The workmanship, styles and sheer quantity of material included in this deposit reveals a community with significant wealth and power. They may have had connections across Europe – not something usually associated with northern Britain in the Iron Age.

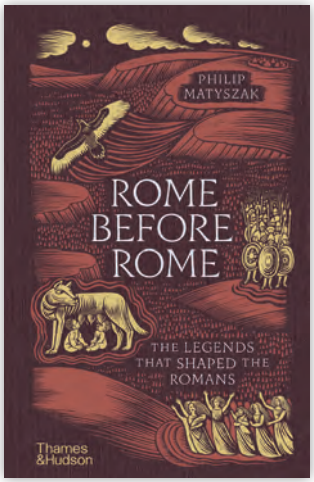
The ability to destroy such material is also a conspicuous symbol of wealth and power.

This highly unusual hoard challenges assumptions of an impoverished northern British Iron Age and secures North Yorkshire as an area of significant power during the British Iron Age.

Indeed, the Melsonby Hoard emphasises the power and wealth of communities in northern Britain 2,000 years ago.



Above: A selection of artefacts from the Melsonby Hoard



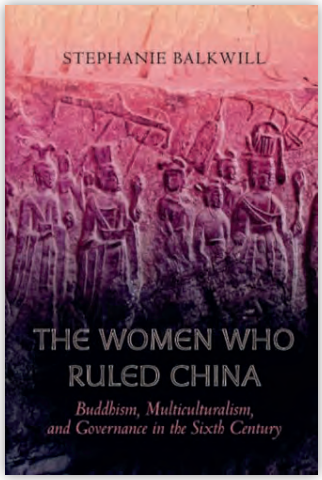
Rome Before Rome. The legends that shaped the Romans

Philip Matyszak
Thames & Hudson
Published: April 2024

An in-depth exploration of the myths and legends of early Rome, highlighting the enigmatic origins of the Romans and how the first seeds of this vast empire were sown.

Some of the legends are well known, from Romulus and Remus to the Rape of the Sabines; others are more obscure, suchas the story of the Latin king Picus, who was turned into a woodpecker. Whether renowned or unfamiliar, all are significant in their own way and have had a profound impact on centuries of Romans.

Matyszak dissects these myths, investigating the historical texts of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and Livy as well as Vergil's epic poem the *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. *Rome Before Rome* continually reveals the ways in which Rome's mythological past may not be as illustrious as traditionally chronicled.



The Women who ruled China

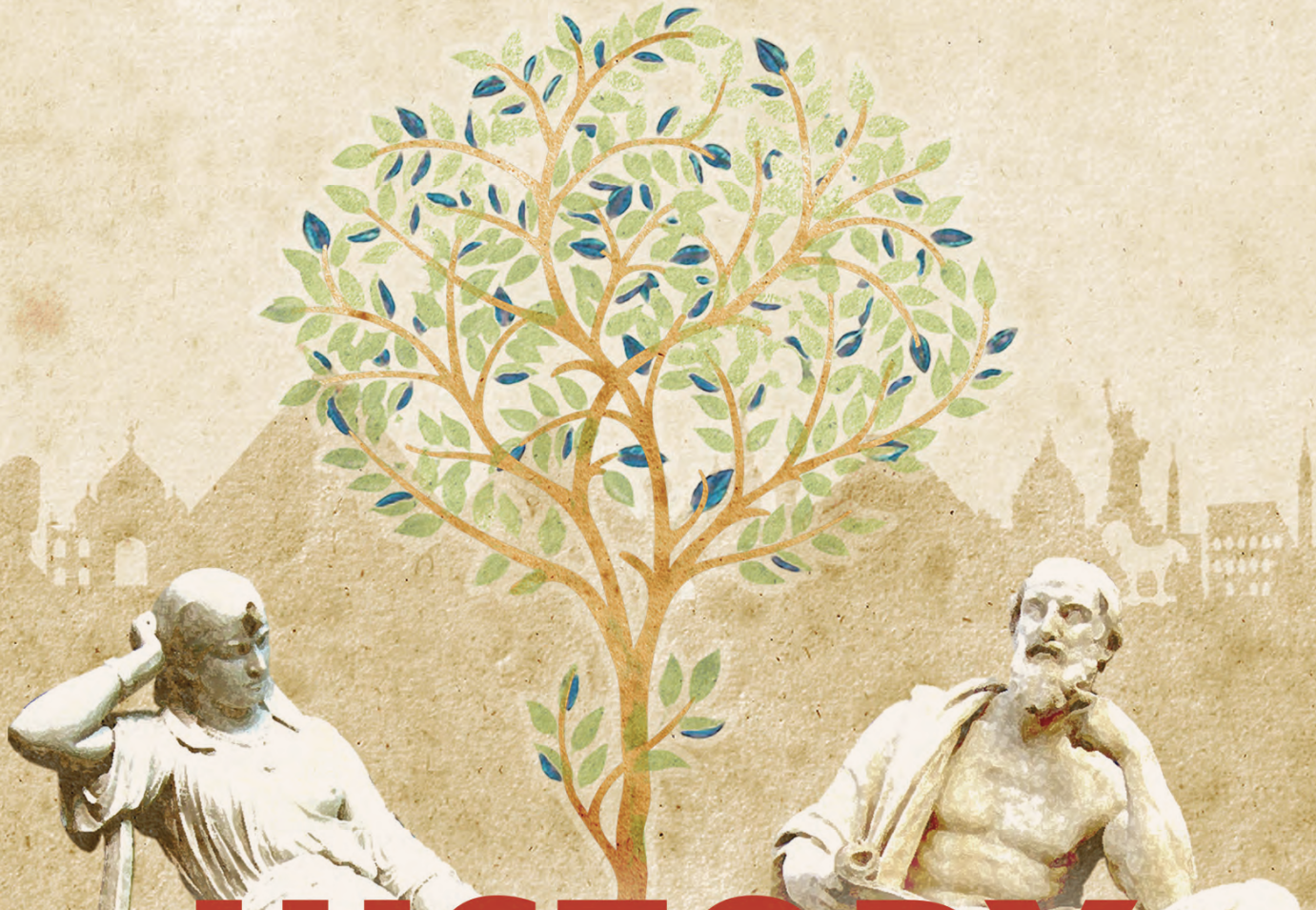
Stephanie Balkwill
University of California Press
Published: 2024

In the late fifth century, a girl whose name has been forgotten by history was born at the edge of the Chinese empire. By the time of her death, she had transformed herself into Empress Dowager Ling, one of the most powerful politicians of her age and one of the first Buddhist women to wield incredible influence in dynastic East Asia.

In *The Women who ruled China: Buddhism, Multiculturalism, and Governance in the Sixth Century,* Balkwill documents the Empress Dowager's rise to power and life on the throne against the broader world of imperial China under the rule of the Northern Wei dynasty, a foreign people from Inner Asia. Building on largely untapped Buddhist materials, Balkwill shows that the life and rule of the Empress Dowager is a larger story of the reinvention of religious, ethnic, and gender norms in a rapidly changing multicultural society.

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